

IN A SNAKE'S THROAT.

A Story of Thrilling Adventure on the Amazon.

[Boston Commercial Bulletin.]

Leaving our camp on a suitable spot on the south shore of the Amazon, as nearly as that river can be said to have gone, Muriella and I proceeded to make daily excursions into the forest in all directions, usually leaving two of the boatmen in charge of the camp, and taking the other two along to carry supplies. The concession proved to be a most magnificent forest. Mahogany trees were there by the thousands, needing but the woodman's axe and transportation down the river to fetch 250 pounds apiece. The tract was intersected by creeks in all directions, along which timber might readily be floated to the river.

It was some ten days after our arrival at the concession when I took Muriella with me for a short expedition into the forest. It was a feast-day with the Indians, and as we intended to return before evening we left them all four in camp, merely providing ourselves with a round of hardback apiece and some cold venison for lunch. At noon, where we sat down to eat our lunch, Muriella discovered near by a clump of low bushes bearing a yellowish berry. This fruit he professed to recognize as a familiar variety which he had often eaten down toward the coast, though he had never seen any before so far in the interior. After tasting them, he pronounced them delicious, but of somewhat different flavor to those on the east coast.

We both ate of the berries liberally without the least suspicion of injurious effects. I found them, as Muriella declared, delicious. Ten minutes after eating the first berry, however, both of us became thrilled with a strange exhilaration. We became almost deliriously happy. Muriella, having out in the Portuguese language, and with hysterical hilarity, as though intoxicated with absinthe. As for myself, my whole nervous system tingled with pleasing excitement to the very finger-tips. I was fairly intoxicated. I had a vague recollection of making a ludicrous resolve to check my own wild impulses to sing, by nodding my head in rhythmic approval of Muriella's vocal outburst; of seeing Muriella fall over on her ground, and of distinctly remembering his example. Then all became a blank.

This happened about midday. Not until nearly sunset on the following day did consciousness again slowly commence to assert itself. I then awoke, as if from a dream, to find myself extricated out of a hideous nightmare that could be called an awakening—with a horrible sensation of helplessness. I seemed as though the lower half of my body was numb and paralyzed by heavy pressure from all directions. A vague impression that my lower limbs were dead and all the blood forced out of them into the upper part of my body, crept over me. My eyes seemed staring, and my mouth as if I were singing was in my ears, and my breath came in labored pants. My throat was hot and dry with a raging thirst. I was not yet fully recovered from my senses. I felt as though I were in a trance, or a person freezing to death, my natural inclination was to let things take their course. It seemed useless to think of trying to extricate myself from the vise-like embrace that appeared to clutch me as in a rubber would at terrible tension from the waist down. It was only a nightmare, which would pass away in a little while. And yet it couldn't be a nightmare, for I was dimly conscious of being awake after all, and not asleep and dreaming.

Realizing this, by a supreme effort of the will I aroused my well-nigh dormant faculties to a sense that something terrible was the matter. My limbs began to move, and my mind, and I tried to raise myself up—I was lying face downward. As I strove to rise I was dragged backward several feet along the ground. Horrified and bewildered, I raised myself up with a frantic effort, sufficient to look toward my less-than-less extremity. My God! I was half-choked in the throat of a monster boa. This hideous reptile, finding me lying at length on the ground, gaped, had deliberately set about swallowing me.

Now I was thoroughly aroused, the sensation was as though some powerful suction-pump were employed in dragging me remorselessly down, down, down, inch by inch, into the slithering depths of my devourer's stomach, and I was suffering no physical pain to speak of; the dreadful pressure on the lower half of the body created only numbness there; above was a sense of oppressiveness, but there was an utter absence of acute pain.

An indescribably sickening odor also emanated from the monstrous reptile that was leisurely working me down his throat. It was the breath from the cool and slimy stomach that already extended my feet and legs, and would ere long close over my head. Maddened at the loathsome prospect, I gave a horrified scream of agony, and clutching frantically at the ground I struggled frantically to free myself from the deadly embrace of the serpent's throat.

As well might some modern Canute try to stay the tidal wave's resistless course, as I to struggle for freedom from the living reptile stretched like rubber about every hair-breadth of what it engulfed. As I struggled I could feel the hooked fangs of my devourer clutch the back of my neck, and I was aware of the horrible suction-pump below seemed to be worked with anxious energy.

As soon as I realized the utter hopelessness of accomplishing anything by struggling, a complete change came over me. I became calm and collected as if there was nothing to be alarmed at in my position. So cool and philosophical did I begin to review the situation that I concluded I must have suddenly gone mad.

If there was the slightest hope of escape, I argued with myself, it would be in keeping my presence of mind, and remaining perfectly quiet. Every struggle I might make to get loose would land me an inch further down in the depths of the boa's slippery throat, by bringing me to the waist, and thus by offering a merely positive resistance I might keep my head and shoulders outside as long as life remained. From the time I discovered myself to be in the lethal embrace of the monster, I was resolved to arrive at what could hardly have been three minutes.

For the first time since recovering consciousness my thoughts now found opportunity to wander from my predicament, and my first thought was of Muriella. What had become of him? Was he, too, being devoured, or was he already destroyed? A gleam of hope shot through my brain at the query. Perhaps he is unhurt, and when he recovers from the stupefying effects of the berries will be able to render me assistance.

In my anxiety to see if Muriella was anywhere around, I tried to look about me. The movement disturbed the boa, and again he dragged me backward two or three feet, and again the pressure from below exerted its power to try and drag me in. So long as I remained perfectly quiet the boa seemed content to let nature take its course, and to remain in a semi-comatose condition. He seemed to realize that he had undertaken a tremendous task, and one that required a great deal of patience. The least movement on my part, however, he would interpret at once into an effort of his prey to escape, and would reciprocate by trying to swallow me.

Hence, that the horror of my position seemed to lengthen into days, passed by. I thought I should go stark, raving mad, as I felt the fangs of my hideous devourer scraping against my back in jacket to try and inch me further down his throat.

The heavy odor of the reptile's breath was like some overpowering drug, which if distilled up and applied in moderation might even be tolerable to the nostrils. Darkness came, and added to the terror of my situation. My nerves were now badly shattered, and in the darkness my sight was pitiable in the extreme. How I longed to describe the weird horrors of that dreadful night! It seemed an eternity spent amid all the blackness and the mental tortures of hell itself.

Morning dawned at last, although I never thought it would come and find me in possession of my senses. Why it didn't find me a raving maniac or a blubbering idiot seemed the strangest thing that had yet happened.

My first thought was to ascertain whether the gutta-serena-like opening in my living tomb had gained on me during those awful hours of darkness or not. I was lying all this while face downward, and although by this time weakness almost to a state of helplessness, I used

my left hand to feel the taut rim of the monstrous throat, and found that it had indeed higher up my body than yesterday. The excitement of the night I had just passed through had exhausted my emotions, and I remember that the sinister discovery awakened in me no sense of uneasiness.

I tried to form some plan of putting an end to my existence; but my brain refused to make connection between my dim, disjointed ideas. I thought it was no longer equal to the concentration of a definite idea. I was now beyond all creative emotions. Once I fancied I heard the cry of some animal or human being near by; but I was too far gone to pay any attention.

At last it seemed to be over with me. It was as though the darkness of night had gradually closed over me again; a roaring noise in my ears continued for a while. The darkness and then all was silent. I had sunk into the unconsciousness of complete exhaustion.

I remember nothing more until I came to my senses again in our camp on the river bank. A couple of days' nursing by Muriella brought me round so that I could sit up and listen to his account of my rescue. The cry I fancied I heard just before sinking into unconsciousness was from Muriella. The effects of the berries had kept him stupefied until the dawn of the second day, the close of the night so full of horrible experiences to me. He had awakened, weak and burning with thirst. Rising up, he beheld not a dozen yards away my head and shoulders protruding from the mouth of a monster boa, whose scaly body lay in serpentine lengths among the debris of decaying forest fungus.

Taking it for granted that I was dead, and chilled with terror, he uttered the horrified cry which I had dimly heard, and rushed away to camp. Being an expert woodman, he had no difficulty in finding his way. The Indians had about given us up for lost. They had searched for us, but had never happened to visit the right place. Two were out searching when he reached the camp. Trembling with weakness and terror, he told the Indians the fate that had befallen us.

Returning with axes and crocodile-spears the party attacked the boa, chopping him completely in two just below the bulge in his back caused by my feet and legs before he could escape. At the first blow of the ax the monster made spasmodic efforts to disgorge in order to attack his assailants. He tried hard to escape, but he was so fully applied, and he was rendered powerless.

The severed head and neck had to be left open before I could be released. At first they thought I was dead, but were soon rejoiced at discovering a lingering spark of life. Carrying me to the camp, resuscitative remedies were applied, and I was, as you have seen, finally brought around.

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